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# DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE  
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY  
AT HOME & ABROAD



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# DRAMA

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THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

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## PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By A. E. Wilson

NOT since those far-off days in 1910 when the production of Rostand's "Chantecler" excited the theatrical world to white-heat has any play enjoyed so much preliminary *réclame* as Barrie's "The Boy David" which, after many postponements and disappointments, was at last produced at His Majesty's on December 15th, 1936.

It would be difficult for any play to live up to such expectations but "The Boy David," product of a 76 year old playwright, may be conceded a remarkable piece of work if only because it so artfully exploits the peculiar charm and talent of Elisabeth Bergner.

Most will perhaps be surprised by its very simplicity. It is an idyllic presentation of the shepherd boy who could slay lion and Goliath yet remain beset by childish fears. In Barrie's view David was a boy who never grew up—a Biblical Peter Pan if such irreverence be permitted. David accomplishes his deeds of valour in a kind of dreamy ecstasy of wonderment, attributing all such deeds to the mysterious "Other Self." This is a typical Barrie touch in a play which, if here and there rather austere, has many exquisite moments. Such for example as that delightful scene in which David and Saul on their first encounter fall to talking as one shepherd to another.

Miss Bergner invests her part with a curiously attractive air of eager wonderment and appealing youthfulness, and the granite strength of Godfrey Tearle's Saul, the acting of Sir John Martin-Harvey, Leon Quartermaine and Jean Cadell and the fine stage decorations of Augustus John adorn the play which will not disappoint the great world of Barrie lovers. Others may blench at this grafting of whimsy upon Biblical narrative.

Another major event was the production of Granville-Barker's once banned and for many years neglected "Waste" at the Westminster. It is not to the credit of the censorship that we have so long been deprived of this theatrical masterpiece—for masterpiece it undoubtedly is even though in these hurried days the tempo of it may be deemed slow and the question of church disestablishment no longer so urgent that the fate of Trebell's Bill excites us.

But the problem of the play is as urgent as ever and the intellectual force of the writing remains undiminished. Moreover it still affords admirable theatrical entertainment. The cast in the Westminster revival was mostly extremely competent. Perhaps Nicholas Hannen did not give enough human warmth to the character of Trebell though his playing was marked with great firmness. Felix Aylmer's Prime Minister was a gem of character acting.

"Waste" would have been a more fitting title for Ben Travers' "O Mistress Mine" which, though it enjoyed the assistance of the exquisite Yvonne Printemps and of Pierre Fresnay, had a very short run at the St. James's. This Ruritanian romance lacked everything likely to carry so frail a thing to success. The situations were the stock tricks of hide-and-seek and pretence that belong to Aldwych farce; wit was wholly lacking and Mlle. Printemps wasted her charm upon deplorably dull stuff.

Another novelty was the revival of Dekker's "The Witch of Edmonton" at the Old Vic. This once topical piece has only once been revived since it was first produced in 1621. It has not been neglected without reason for

## PLAYS OF THE MONTH

its faults are many and its virtues few. It has interest as a curiosity from the theatre lumber room and little more, though Michel St. Denis, the French producer, lavished upon it a wealth of scenic elaboration. He also claimed some metaphysical reason for the presence of the dog who is Mother Sawyer's "familiar." The average playgoer will not take the piece quite so seriously as that. Edith Evans played the witch with great zest and sinister vigour though her acting was not without that quality of pathos which the character should command.

At the little Mercury Theatre Ashley Dukes heroically (and at times with profit) pursues the poetic drama. His latest venture has been "Panic," in which the young American bard, Archibald Macleish gives poetic treatment to the strangely unlikely theme of the great business slump. I did not think the result wholly happy or extremely successful though as an experiment the play has some interest. Franklin Dyall found verse no handicap to his vigorous acting as the financier villain of the piece, but I found the less one was aware of the poetry the more effective and moving became the drama.

Another interesting experiment was Robert Atkins' Sunday evening production of "Henry V" at The Ring, Blackfriars which normally is a boxing resort. Mr. Atkins, ardent Shakespearean, saw in this strange, bare milieu the very cockpit and wooden O of Shakespeare's time. The play was produced without scenery but with simple drapings very much as in the old days. The platform projected right into the auditorium and the players thus had a certain three-dimensional aspect which brought vigour and life into their performance, making every speech and every word tell. This satisfies many enthusiasts but I am one of those who would not deny Shakespeare his pomp and pageantry and find illusion aided by such despised accessories.

"Hell for Leather" at the Phoenix is a play about motor-racing by Barre Lyndon who wrote "The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse." Here the excitement is very well contrived and those responsible for the clever mechanics, the noises and effects of the piece deserve to share the honours with playwright and players.

## THE THEATRE IN BERLIN

By Marie Seton

LAST season the Nationalist-Socialist Government subsidised the German theatre to the extent of thirty-six million marks. Out of the twenty-three important theatres in Berlin, thirteen are still privately owned, five are under the direction of General Goering; while another five are protected by Dr. Goebbels. Eight of these theatres are playing operettas, seven are specialising in modern comedies, two are producing opera and ballet, two the classics and a few well known modern dramas; while the remaining four are chiefly, but not entirely concerned with the production of 'herioc' dramas inspired by the philosophy of National-Socialism. So far National-Socialism's main contribution to drama has been the construction of a number of open-air theatres which have been built with the help of the compulsory Labour Service. These theatres are an adaptation of the Greek Theatre, and one of the most beautiful is the Dietrich Eckardt-Bühne near the Olympic Stadium in Berlin.

The State theatres and private theatres alike are finally controlled by the Reichstheaterkammer which is under the direction of Dr. Schlösser, appointed by the Propaganda Minister to the Post of President of the Council and Reichsdramaturg. All people seeking employment in the State theatres are obliged to go before this council for an examination and receive a licence entitling them to work. It is stated that private theatres can employ people who have not applied for this certificate; but it is generally agreed that it is an advantage to have been granted it. According to a member of Dr. Schlösser's staff, Jews are not permitted to be connected with the German stage except in the special Jewish Culture Theatre. Any person with one Jewish grandparent is generally, but not always regarded as non-Aryan.

In the matter of censorship the laws are theoretically elastic but in practice they are rigorous. A play, provided it is not of foreign origin, can be produced without the manuscript being submitted to the Reichsdramaturg, —musical comedies often are. But, should a theatre present what is loosely termed a

## THE THEATRE IN BERLIN

'dangerous' play, i.e., a political or controversial play, the manager runs the risk of punishment, the nature of which is not defined by officials. Naturally no Jewish author's play, nor play adapted from a Jewish source, can be produced. On the other hand, officials state that sex-problem plays are seldom subject to censorship.

Where the theatres remain free from the new 'epic' style there are still excellent performances. There are light commercial entertainments such as the musical comedy "Ball der Nationen" at the Metropol Theater. It has quite delightful freshness and compares favourably with the best of its kind elsewhere. Freshness and originality is also to be found in some of the comic ballets at the Deutsches Opernhaus; there the ballet company is by no means pirouetting into its grave. Though they may not rank very high as art, these two gay and sophisticated entertainments are hopeful signs. They suggest that all the fashions and decess of dictatorship cannot make an entire population discard joy through laughter in order to find it in political epics and martial songs.

The two most important theatres are the Deutsches Theater which since Reinhardt left Germany has been under the direction of one of his pupils, Heinz Hilpert; and the State Theater Schauspielhaus. At the former the last season's programme included "Romeo and Juliet," "The Winter's Tale" and Schiller's "Love and Intrigue"; while modern drama was represented by Shaw's "St. Joan" and Merton Hodge's comedy "The Wind and the Rain." At the Schauspielhaus the repertoire consisted of Aeschylus' trilogy the Oresteia, Goethe's Faust, Part I and II, "King Lear," "Hamlet," Scribe's "Glass of Water," Beaumarchais "Der Tolle Tag" and "Thomas Paine" by Hans Johst. In both cases the choice of plays was good, but it represents only the achievements of the past.

In October, 1931 I saw "Agamemnon," the first play of the Oresteia trilogy at the Schauspielhaus; but though several members of the 1931 cast are playing in the present production, a remarkable change has taken place in the general character of the performance. In 1931 the production endeavoured to follow the Greek tradition so far as it was feasible in another period and a foreign language. To-day those traditions have been greatly modified by Lothar Müthel (he played

the Herald in 1931) in favour of 'realism.' In 1931 the chorus was composed of students of Greek from the Berlin university who were perfectly trained in choral speaking; now the chorus is played by actors who portray the members of it as a motley crowd of chance spectators; only the chorus of the Furies is still presented in a more or less traditional manner. Likewise, the leading characters are more humanly played, with the result that the three separate plays take on the character of a three act historical melodrama. This new interpretation is undoubtedly effective theatre; it brings the remote philosophical-religious questions of fate, sin and its expiation so to speak into the front parlour. Throughout it is excellently acted in a straightforward swash-buckling manner. The most disappointing thing is the décor. Traugott Müller seeks to make the best of two worlds, and, therefore, his décor is neither true to the architectural style of the 4th century, nor yet to the alleged period of Agamemmon whose palace has been excavated at Mycenae. One might say that Aeschylus himself mixed his periods since Athens barely existed at the time of the Mycenaean civilization; but then he was presenting a drama of religious philosophy, whereas Herr Müthel is attempting to present the Gods and Heroes as figures of the same dimensions as Frederick the Great. Probably this is done in order to draw a parallel between classical Greece and the Third Reichs.

At the Deutsches Theater Heinz Hilpert's production of "The Winter's Tale" is carried out in subdued colours and with décor on simple but lofty lines. The only false note in a beautiful performance was the acting of the Perdita and Florizel who were very poor. Hilpert's production of Shaw's "St. Joan" with Paula Wessely in the title role is also excellent. Her performance stands out for its essential honesty. Her Joan has all the violence and blind faith necessary for anyone who would force a lax army into action, and then control that army. She is certainly a leader, but not a spiritual one. Far more convincing as a soldier than as a saint, she is so much the victim of her own indomitable wishes that she would never hear any voice, divine or otherwise, but her own telling her France must be saved at any cost.

One cannot talk of the German stage to-day without including the dramas extolling in one way or another the creed of Adolph Hitler.

Many of them are written by young poets and performed by amateur groups inside such official organizations as the Kraft durch Freude (Strength Through Joy Movement) and the Reichs Labour Service, and they accompany political festivals and congresses. Other pageant plays are produced by professional companies. Two of the most important were performed in connection with the Olympic Games; they were "The Olympic Festival of Youth" written by Carl Diem and "The Frankenburger Game of Dice" by Eberhard Wolfgang Moeller.

"The Olympic Festival" was conceived on a gigantic scale ten thousand people taking part in it. The prologue in which the single figure of the Speaker dominated the empty arena of the Olympic Stadium was the most dramatic and impressive thing one could wish to see. He stood on the flight of steps leading up to the enormous brazier in which the Olympic fire leapt like the spirit of adventure incarnate.

The first tableau was called "Children at Play." It was produced by Dorothee Gunther, and performed by nine hundred boys and two thousand three hundred girls between the age of eleven and twelve. The children formed rings and long lines; during their ceaseless movement they arranged themselves so as to present a picture of the Olympic flag.

"Frankenburger Game of Dice" is history revisited after a course in National Socialist ideology. It sets out 'to create a new form,' 'a new conception of time' and it is a 'creative perception which sees the past in a new way,' i.e., relative to National-Socialism. But what ever this new form may become in time, it cannot dramatically fill the space of the Dietrich-Ekhardt-Bühne at present.

The producers, Mathias Wiemann and Werner Pleister, only succeeded in producing this play as a continuous tableaux vivant and not as a drama. The crowd which could have been vitally important was a lethargic mass huddled together; while the characters in effectively exaggerated padded costumes moved about like small chessmen without being theatrically effective. Though this pageant play leaves a great deal to be desired, such a style might be interesting if the authors newly inspired with National-Socialist fervour could overcome the temptation for philosophical-political argument and be content to be frankly spectacular.

## SAWDUST ON THE STEPPES

By Doré Silverman

It is now circus-time in London (Britain). In Moscow it is circus-time all the year round. But Soviet Russia has no Bertram Mills, no Ringling or Barnum, no Lord John Sanger. Instead, it has the G.O.M.E.T.S., or the State Corporation of Circus and Musical Attractions, for in Russia the circus, like every other form of public amusement or instruction, is a State-regulated activity.

From State-ownership to State-training is but a step, and Moscow's "Circus Technicum School" claims to be the only school in the world for the training of circus performers. Graduates are taught history and political economy as well as acrobatics and jugglery. The reason, it was given to me, is that "their education should not be narrowly specialised." Indeed, the Circus-school professors will tell you proudly that every Soviet jockey knows his Shakespeare. If you are intrepid enough to retort that this does not necessarily make him a better circus-performer, you will be told that you do not understand the trend of education in Russia to-day.

It is not only the human performers who are trained on unusual lines. The animals, too, are prepared with a scientific thoroughness I had not encountered elsewhere. Zoopsychology is a deep and serious science in Soviet Russia, while the teachings of the famous Pavlov form the basis of circus-instruction.

There is in Moscow a street which looks much like any other of the capital's thousand streets—Durov-street. This, you are told, is the only street in the world named after a circus performer. Yet to call Vladimir Durov a circus performer seems an understatement, for he controls a most astonishing training-school for circus-animals. His study is filled with drawings, diagrams and mathematical tables, his laboratory with test-tubes, retorts and curious liquids, while the cellars and out-houses contain a veritable menagerie. Seals, wolves, elephants, hyenas, foxes, as well as the tamer geese, mice, pigs, and rats are in his collection.

Before these are trained, they are studied and experimented upon—painlessly, so far as



PAULA WESSELY IN "SAINT JOAN" AS  
PRODUCED BY HEINZ HILPERT AT THE  
DEUTES THEATER, BERLIN.



SCENE FROM "EGYPTIAN NIGHTS"  
 (ADAPTED FROM SHAKESPEARE, PUSHKIN  
 AND SHAW) AS PRODUCED BY A. TAIROV,  
 AT THE KAMERNY THEATRE, MOSCOW.

## SAWDUST ON THE STEPPES

I was aware. Reactions to light and sound, certain noises causing certain animals to respond in a definable and anticipated manner—these rules are at the bottom of Pavlov's teachings. If your dog knows that his bowl of water is always placed in a certain corner of the room, thirst will make him turn instinctively to that corner: that is the law of reflexes in its simplest terms.

In one room Durov was rehearsing a troop of mice. A toy train slowed down as it entered a 'station' and, as it stopped, a number of mice rushed out from an enclosure marked 'waiting-room' and took their seats in the train. Then one mouse, the 'station-master,' signalled the train's "all-ready," a second, at the signals, set the points, a third lowered the signal, while a fourth, at the engine, set the train in motion. It sounds fantastic, I admit, and redolent more of a celebrated mouse of motion-picture fame, but all this is a result of months of training. And why should it sound more astonishing or incredible than a seal playing "God Save the King" on a series of klaxon-horns?

Durov, with half-a-century of circus work with animals to his credit, is endowed by the State, and his methods, scientific and painless, are in general use by animal-training schools throughout the land. Vitali Lazarenko, with thirty-five years' work in the sawdust ring behind him, is another circus veteran.

"One thing that the Russian State Circus has achieved" I was told in Moscow, "is the eradication of the idea that the clown, the jockey, and the circus performer in general, belong to the lower orders of the entertainment world. It is true that years ago the circus folk were often ignorant people, whose boundaries were the limits of the field in which they performed, but in the Russia of to-day that is changed. These people are, with other public players and performers, brothers in art. With the opera-singer, the stage-player, and the orchestral conductor, they form one united family of artists."

Lazarenko, for instance, sustains a popularity which even Charlie Chaplin in his heyday would not have disdained. With his circus, or even alone, he tours the countryside, performing now in factory, now in a workmen's club, or a new settlement, or even down in the coal-mines. Acrobats and bare-back riders have even won the coveted distinction of "Honoured Artist of the Republic" or the higher "People's Artist of the Republic."

Nearly every city in each of the Soviet Republics has its circus: the smaller places are served by travelling village circuses. Behind each and all of these is the G.O.M.E.T.S., which trains and engages the performers, decides on their itinerary, and even on their material. It deals also with the administrative side and sees, for instance, that in spite of the "daring" of some acts, every possibility of hurt or danger is eliminated, and with this view no aerial act is allowed to be performed without a safety-net spread below. Other precautions include the provision of firemen who, permanently on duty, stand ready with their hoses against any outbreak of temper or temperament on the part of the animals.

Any one who knows anything of the attitude of the Russian Government to entertainment will hardly expect the Russian circus to have the same entertainment-appeal as the circus has, let us say, in this country. This is the official *credo* of the Society on the Circus, as given to me by one of the officials of the G.O.M.E.T.S.:

"Fundamental in the Soviet circus is the aim of combining the interesting and the useful. The circus is intimately bound up with the life around it. It is no mere 'art for art's sake'. Thus, the traditional numbers are often given in a more dramatised form, planned with the aid of artists and writers, and produced by a theatrical director. The clowns' repertoire comes in for a large share of attention. In place of the traditional jokes and tricks, witty texts are written for them by experienced writers, who keep their 'patter' up-to-date, and ridicule the social shortcomings of the people."

The ultimate phrase is open to many interpretations. I will say only this, that there is something in the Circus which no State-regimentation can drive out, no government decree or ideology obfuscate or eradicate. These Russian clowns, with their painted faces, negroid lips, exaggerated eyebrows, and grotesque, ill-fitting clothes look very much the same as their fellow-clowns all over the world. And the response they obtain from their audiences is likewise universal in its manifestation: chuckles, smiles, roars of laughter, happy faces and tears of mirth. The circus appeals to the child in each one of us. Even in Russia.

# THE THEATRE IN PALESTINE

By a British Resident

THE theatre symbolizes a world in which we profoundly desire to live, if only during the fleeting hours spent at the playhouse. The incoherent sequence of events of actual life is replaced by an intelligible, connected plot. Human beings revealing themselves in what they do and in what they say, freely exercising their emotions, expressive in their speech, in the mobility of their features, and moving with dignity and poise—what a contrast to the cramped personality, the incomplete and the inarticulate experience, the clumsy manner, the inadequate language of the ordinary man.

Although belonging to the realm of fancy with no counterpart in nature, the world of the theatre is more to us than life itself. Unencumbered by accidents and accessory details, the free play of dramatic action discloses a deeper meaning in things and affords glimpses of some essential truths lost in the exuberant growth of life's vast jungle.

There are hours when the awakening consciousness of a society results in a collective craving for self-revelation, calling for dramatic expression. Such an hour struck for the Jewish people when, carried by the wave of national revival, it tore the veil of familiarity from its eyes and beheld the pageant of ghetto life with a new curiosity. The Habimah Theatre then stepped in and answered the need.

After a few preliminary trials, the performance of the "Dubbuk, or the Possessed," laid the foundation of the new Hebrew drama. The adoption of the Hebrew tongue instead of the vernacular ensured the nobility of the spoken word and served as a stimulating influence towards style. The "Dubbuk" was the first of an imposing series of creations bearing upon ghetto life. "The Golem," "The Treasure," "Amha," "The Short Friday," "Uriel Acosta," "Jew Suss," "The Eternal Jew," "The Merchant of Venice" and the latest "William Tell," testify to the untiring efforts of the Habimah to impress the stamp of their living art upon traditional Jewish life.

Sordid realities, lingering, age-old superstitions, the tragedy of the ghetto bride, the religious fanaticism within the walls and the religious intolerance without, yield a melancholy tune. Against that, the ready expect-

ation of miracles, the Messianic hope, the feeling of holiness of the individual Jew arising out of the observance of the numerous taboos ordained by Jewish ritual, and, above all, the dream-land of mystic exaltation with its bid for spiritual freedom, are caught in a rapturous other-worldly rhythm of their own, whether Oriental, Slavic or Mediæval Jew.

The new Jewish life in Palestine, with its breaking away from ghetto standards, has failed to date to inspire the playwright. Ancient Jewish history might have supplied fitting analogies for modern situations, but the few Biblical plays produced by the Habimah—"The Crown of David" and "Rahab"—have no link with the present.

The production of plays drawn from the treasure house of Biblical literature offers great possibilities for Hebrew drama. The contact with the genuine East in Palestine has fostered in the thoroughly realistic setting of recent Biblical plays but it has not yet gone any farther. The established iconography stands as firm as a rock, and dramatists have not found their way to a new interpretation and to a modern understanding of the great figures of the past. Thus it may be pointed out that prophetic personalities are still represented on the stage in the guise of old, wailing preachers, instead of the young exalted leaders they are. Not until prejudice and routine are overpowered, not until playwrights consider the Bible without the dulling sense of familiarity and with a freshened vision, will great Hebrew drama come into existence.

In response to a steady demand in Palestine, the Habimah, and the workers' theatre, the "Ohel," as well as several recently established producers such as the "Teatron Ivri," comprising German immigrants, have staged a number of plays, classical and modern, on subjects of general interest. Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night," Moliere's "Tartuffe," "The Devil's Disciple" of G. B. Shaw, "The Sacred Flame" by Somerset Maugham, "On the Fringe of the City" by Langer, and Leivick's "Chains," have been recreated in the Habimah's own style.

This style is not easily defined. It is the fruit of a constringing for adequate forms of expression. The general tendency is directed towards an eminently lifelike character of

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dramatic action, without ever condescending to a photographic imitation of life.

Finally, there is the audience of the Habimah. The full extent of its passionate interest in the stage can only be measured at one of those public debates on some recent play, customary in the Jewish centres of Palestine, which attract thousands of participants and which

last into the small hours of the morning. And when on a Habimah night invisible threads are moved between the spell-bound audience and the transfigured and inspired actors, we are reminded once more of the fact that the roots and the essence of the theatre are to be sought in collective worship.

## THIRTY YEARS AGO

By Alan Jenkins

THE English theatre of 1906 compares interestingly with present-day drama. Then operatta was the prevailing fashion; veteran actors of to-day, on screen and stage, were making first appearances or playing juvenile leads; Ibsen was dying, and so was J. L. Toole; Messrs. Vedrenne and Granville-Barker began their fifth series of repertory-matinees at the Court Theatre with "The Silver Box," by an unknown dramatist named Galsworthy; and Ellen Terry celebrated her Jubilee.

I have before me playbills and critiques of that year. H. B. Irving, Beerbohm Tree, Lewis Waller—such popular idols were many; yet it is not for details of them that these absorbing documents are so instructive.

A young and hitherto unknown author called Rudolph Besier destined some day to write "The Barretts", in 1906 achieved a notable failure with "The Virgin Goddess." Thanks to "The Daily Mail's" fierce denunciation it ran for barely a month. Of Mr. Cyril Maude, however, we learn that he enjoyed great success in a farce, "Toddles," about which a contemporary observer writes: "The appearance of the popular comedian in bed and in his pyjamas has drawn crowds, chiefly of ladies." J. M. Barrie was represented this year only by two trifles, in one of which ("Josephine") Mr. Dion Boucicault "gave a clever representation of a Chamberlain in petticoats." A critic of the day comments thus, surprisingly:—"Nothing is more singular about Barrie than the manner in which now and again he seems wilfully to violate the canons of good taste; witness 'Margaret Ogilvie,' passages in 'The Admirable Crichton' and even 'Peter Pan.'"

The outstanding Shakespearian production of the year was Tree's "Anthony and Cleopatra," wherein "Miss Constance Collier depicted Cleopatra as a woman whose influence over Anthony was physical rather than intellectual, which—" (the addition is naive!)—"which was perhaps the view Shakespeare intended to convey."

Among the principal successes of thirty years ago was "Raffles," starring Gerald du Maurier: we are told that "the construction of the piece is as good as the moral is undoubtedly bad, for everyone in the audience is extremely anxious that the rascally hero should escape the fitting reward of his misdeeds." Then there was a comedy by another new author called W. J. Locke, "The Morals of Marcus": the critics thought it "promising," and the heroine was played by Alexandra Carlisle, whose death in New York was reported a few months ago. It was said that the play made her, and that she made the play. As for sentiment and melodrama, these were provided by Mr. Hall Caine every autumn at Drury Lane: 1906 saw the production of "The Bondman," which enlightened opinion considered "machine-made ..... a weariness of the spirit," with Mrs. Patrick Campbell in the totally unsuitable part of Greeba.

Optimists believed that musical comedy was "at last on the wane in popularity," holding its own only at the Gaiety, where "that most objectionable piece, 'The Spring Chicken,'" had just finished its run. W. T. Stead thought it "a pestiferous and pestilential farrago of filth." A prettier piece altogether was "The Belle of Mayfair," in which Phyllis Dare unexpectedly took the place of Edna May,

## THIRTY YEARS AGO

and Louie Pound enjoyed a personal triumph. The music, by Leslie Stuart, "is catchy, but—" (we are surprised to read) "—wayward and unequal, like all that he writes. "There was also a trifle by Seymour Hicks and Cosmo Hamilton called "The Beauty of Bath," wherein most of the cast impersonated Bath buns.

Operetta, however, was rapidly gaining ground. In December there appeared an operatic version of "The Vicar of Wakefield," with music by Liza Lehmann; the lyrics were announced to be written "by Mr. Laurence Housman, with additional lyrics by William Shakespeare and others." Meanwhile one of the most successful musical and dramatic events of the year had been the reopening of the Savoy by Mrs. D'Oyly Carte with "The Yeomen of the Guard." Of this a contemporary enthusiast writes:—"Nothing could be more calculated to encourage a taste for the humorous and beautiful, and to check a tendency towards the vulgar and meretricious."

The Stage Society in 1906 did nothing to encourage the "great unacted" in England, for it did not produce a single play by an English dramatist. It concentrated on two inferior plays by Ibsen and Gogol respectively, an out-of-date political tract by Gerhard Hauptmann, and Brieux's "Maternité." This last work was not too well received, since it "deals with a theme quite outside the social and legal systems of this country. The subject and treatment are essentially unpleasant." Unacted plays, indeed, were considered most sympathetically by the Pioneers (motto: "Acta, non Verba"), founded in the previous year. Its first "English" production, amusingly, was "Daughters of Shem," by a Miss Carmen Goldsmid.

As for variety and music-halls, "it is impossible," says the Green Room Book for 1906, "to say that they have struck a higher and purer note than heretofore." Although the Empire and Alhambra remained devoted to ballet (notably Genée in "Coppelia"), although everyone was agreed about the sweetness of Marie Tempest's singing, elsewhere the daringness of France (or perhaps an indigenous daringness) was creeping in. At the Palace Theatre good taste hung in the balance. "It is nothing short of hypocritical," continues the Green Room Book, "to allege that the spectacle of an entirely naked woman, whose flesh is coated with some white pigment to represent a statue, is elevating because it is

artistic." Speaking of the programme in general, W. T. Stead dismissed it as "Drivel for the Dregs," yet (somewhat inconsistently) thought the audacious poses of La Milo "the only redeeming feature in a long monotonous succession of ugliness and vulgarity." At the Tivoli, Harry Fragson had his first big engagement, and astonished both the profession and the public by his cleverness in appealing to London and Paris alike: in Paris, he sang in broken French; in London, in broken English.

Famous plays which first achieved production in 1906 were numerous. "The Silver Box" and one or two others have already been mentioned: there were also Pinero's "His House in Order" (which gave offence to Non-conformists and Liberal journals, except "The Tribune," whose high priest was William Archer); "The Shulamite" (in which Norman McKinnell was the wife-beater); and of course "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" and "The Doctor's Dilemma," whose author was now at last beginning to be taken quite seriously. Yes, thirty years ago was indeed a notable and critical point in the annals of the London stage.

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### CONTINENTAL FIXTURES.

Apart from the ordinary flow of new productions there are few announcements of importance to be made this month beyond the celebrations of the centenary of the death of Russia's greatest poet, A. S. Pushkin, which will fall on February 10th, 1937. The country's leaders in all fields of art will join at Moscow with distinguished foreign representatives in official conferences and lectures to honour Pushkin's memory. An Exhibition is being arranged at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, including paintings by Kiprinsky, Tropinin, Serov, Somov and others; sculpture by Ramazan, Dromogatsky and others; collections of books, manuscripts, etc., the property of, or associated with, Pushkin. Performances will be given of Pushkin's theatrical works and of music connected with his writings. Foreign visitors are invited to participate in the centenary celebrations, and are also offered the opportunity of visiting the places which Pushkin knew and of which he wrote. The occasion thus presents an exceptional opportunity of combining a visit to the Soviet Union to see something of its life and its scenic attractions, with a notable artistic and cultural experience. Details of costs and suggested itineraries will gladly be furnished on request to any leading Travel Agency or to Intourist, Ltd., Bush House, Aldwych, London, W.C.2.

Particulars of the theatrical arrangements to be made in connection with the coming International Exhibition in Paris will be announced in our next Number.

## BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF

### THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE INCORPORATING THE VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY

*President :*

LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN

*Chairman of the Council :*  
VISCOUNT ESHER

*Director :* GEOFFREY WHITWORTH.

*Hon. Treasurer :* ALEC L. REA.

*MSS. for publication in DRAMA will be considered if accompanied by stamps for return if unsuitable. All enquiries should be addressed to the Hon. Secretary at the Office of the League, 9, Fitzroy Square, London, W.1.*

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*Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.*

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THIS Number of "Drama" goes forth with our best New Year wishes both to members of the British Drama League and to all readers of "Drama." As will be seen, it is concerned very largely with the Theatre abroad—this in harmony with a resolution passed unanimously at the Liverpool Conference : That the policy of the Drama League in making contacts with the Foreign Theatre should be maintained and developed. As many of our readers are aware, the British Section of the Société Universelle du Théâtre founded by Gemier of the Paris Odéon, has long been sponsored by the League. This Committee is in course of reconstruction, and moreover, the Director of the League now represents the Drama on the "British Council," a body set up by the Foreign Office to promote artistic and cultural relations with other countries. It is a noteworthy fact that at a time when the surface of international politics is ruffled with so many distracts, the various

European countries, both officially and popularly, have never been more ready to establish friendship on a basis of common artistic interests.

The Memorandum on the working of the League's County Committees, printed elsewhere in this issue, was originally intended for the use of County Secretaries, but we think it will be of general interest to many other members of the League. The success of the scheme will naturally depend on the extent to which the rank and file of the League support the efforts of the Committees. Some Committees are already at work in lively fashion. But in some counties a little time may elapse before the advantages of joint activity may be fully realised. We would particularly draw the attention of our readers to the statistics of Drama League membership in each county. The numbers are instructive. While we are naturally proud of the ever growing strength of our membership, it is evident that there must be still in every county dozens and hundreds of Societies and individuals who have not yet heard of the League and have not realised the benefits of membership. We see no reason why, with hard work and enthusiasm, the membership in many counties should not be doubled by this time next year.

A new feature in the machinery of the Drama League is the establishment by the Council of a special Committee to deal with Drama in the Schools and among young people generally. An important announcement will shortly be made as to the forthcoming programme of this Committee whose Chairman is Mr. Guy Boas, the Headmaster of the Sloane School, Chelsea, where Shakespearean performances by the boys have become famous during the past few years. The Committee also includes among its members, Miss Phyllis Potter, Miss Mona Swann, Miss Mary Kelly, Mr. Ernest Dyer, Mr. Howard Hayden, Mr. J. W. Marriott, Mr. Christopher Wordsworth of Westminster School, and Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth.

# RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by F. Sladen-Smith

"J. T. Grein." By Michael Orme. Murray. 10s. 6d.  
"Myself a Player." By Lena Ashwell. Michael Joseph. 15s.

"How To Make a Pageant." By Mary Kelly. Pitman. 5s.

"English Costume of the Early Middle Ages." By Iris Brooke. A. & C. Black. 6s.

"Peasant Costume in Europe." (Book II). By Kathleen Mann. A. & C. Black. 12s. 6d.

"The Death of Arthur." By E. S. Padmore. Herbert Jenkins. 2s.

"The Young Visitors." Version for Children by Mrs. George Norman and Margaret Mackenzie. French. 2s.

"Check to the King." By Claude Radcliffe. French. 1s.

"The Fairy Bride." By Norreys Jephson O'Connor. French. 2s. 6d.

"Wanted—A Wife." By Winifred and Edith Carter. Ye King's Stone Press. 1s. 6d.

"Educating A Husband." By Edith Carter. Ye King's Stone Press. 1s. 6d.

"His Lady Secretary." By Compton Irving. Ye King's Stone Press. 1s. 6d.

MRS. J. T. Grein, "Michael Orme," has written the

story of her husband's career with deep affection and admiration, and also with a careful emphasis on the more amiable side of professional life. It is not only her husband who is praised (and justly) in these pages—the authoress seems well disposed towards everybody; and in this she follows her husband's example, who was generous enough to send a telegram of good wishes to Pemberton Billing when, ten years after the disgraceful trial, Billing had a play produced.

Mrs. Grein gives a picture of almost super-human labours; "J. T." apparently had a hand in every movement, professional and amateur, which has since made its mark in the theatre; most amazing of all, he also had to think of "his position in the city." How was it done? This book strives to show how, but the magic energy remains a mystery. It is pleasant to read of a few holidays—the description of these being some of the best parts of a book that is a history of an interesting period and a remarkable man. Mr. Conal O'Riordan contributes a foreword which he seems delighted to have had "censored and revised" by Mr. Shaw.

Miss Lena Ashwell's autobiography, "Myself a Player," is utterly different. It is the same London which is dealt with, sometimes the same personalities, but it is another world, a world in which spiritual values dominate. The authoress' early struggles and triumphs in the pre-war theatre (a theatre which now seems to have been so safe and sound), her adventures at the Kingsway, the War Concert parties, the founding of the Lena Ashwell Players, are all described with great sincerity if not always with clarity. There are also, as by-products, illuminating criticisms of Irving, who Miss Ashwell so much admired, of Tree, who "remained in many ways an amateur," of Ibsen, Shaw, George Moore and many others—and when the authoress deals with "the lunacy" of the modern producer and his stultifying influence on the actor, she reaches what, for some, may be the most interesting portion of the book. It is impossible to follow the history of this

strenuous career without becoming conscious of considerable experience of suffering of all kinds, and the firm belief in the ultimate reward of anxiety and pain provides a constant note of courage and beauty.

Miss Mary Kelly's "How to make a Pageant" is as witty as it is instructive. Nothing could be more delightful than the way the authoress (obviously speaking from a wide and, possibly, shattering familiarity with the subject) describes the various pitfalls and dangers which lie in wait for the pageant maker....

the behaviour of crowds, of dogs, of horses (who emerge from the ordeal with honour), of the "county" (who can scarcely be said to do the same), of the problems of writing, production, organizations, costume and make-up, all of which acquire special difficulties when faced with the open air. Pageants, declares Miss Kelly, are history floodlit by drama—here is the hazardous process of making a pageant floodlit by commonsense and humour.

After Miss Kelly's volume, it seems natural to consider the two books on costume in this month's list. Miss Iris Brooke's "English Costume of the Early Middle Ages," completes her seven books on English costume from the tenth to the nineteenth century. It is again crisply informative, with odd details (it is pleasant to learn that one of the earliest examples of a corset in this country was worn by the devil), and there are plenty of useful if not particularly inspiring illustrations. Miss Kathleen Mann's second book of "Peasant Costume in Europe" embraces Denmark, the Baltic States, British Isles, Holland, Poland, Germany and the Balkans, and is not only for the artist and designer but also for the connoisseur; the eight gay colour plates, the sixty-four exquisite drawings, as well as the general distinction of the volume, make it a charming book to possess. The concise chapters describe many remarkable developments of traditional costume, most of which are shown, not only in the full designs, but in the various examples of embroidery, head-dresses, shoes and jewellery.

The remaining books are plays, in three acts or more. In "The Death of Arthur," Mr. E. S. Padmore contrives to surround the Arthurian myth—which has always been a mysterious one—with more mystery than ever. The author may have his authorities for his strange scenes, but the uninitiated reader will thread his way through the maze of conflicting incidents more baffled than bored. "The Young Visitors" is arranged for children by Mrs. George Norman and Miss Margaret Mackenzie. There does not appear to be much attempt at adaptation, and, amusing as it would be when tackled by youngsters, it would still be infinitely funnier acted by grown-ups. "Check to the King" by Mr. Claud Radcliffe, concerns Charles II and the inevitable Nell, and is full of local colouring. Despite weaknesses, it is a likeable affair which might pass an evening pleasantly enough—Odsfsh! "The Fairy Bride" is "A Prologue to Irish Drama," by Mr. Norreys Jephson O'Connor. It is full of fairies and legendary characters and may be effective when acted. But if all Irish drama were like this, an Epilogue would speedily have to be written. "Wanted—A Wife," by Miss Winifred and Miss Edith Carter, is so absurd with its familiar motif of a foolish will, and its resolutely happy ending, that not even a few entertaining situations

## RECENT BOOKS

can disguise its futilities. Miss Edith Carter, by herself is more successful in "Educating a Husband." Here again the plot has its manifest absurdities, but the process of curing a husband of his shocking temper is made the opportunity for so many amusing lines that unambitious groups in search of a "safe" comedy

might find this one useful. The title of Mr. Compton Irving's play "His Lady Secretary," suggests both the play and its atmosphere. It is so obvious that Roger Cremore will marry the fascinating Janet that the few complications in the way seem hardly worth the trouble they may have caused the author.

# MEMORANDUM ON THE WORK OF COUNTY COMMITTEES

IT is hoped that the work of Drama League County Committees may start officially as from January 1st, 1937.

It should be borne in mind that the Committees have been set up for two purposes:

- (1) To secure County representation on the three English Area Committees of the Drama League.
- (2) To mobilise the forces of the Drama League in each County with a view to increasing its membership and of developing the practice and study of the Drama in all its forms.

The provision of machinery by which scattered members of the League and affiliated Societies can work together inaugurates what may well be a new era in the history of the League. For the success of the scheme it is essential that County Committees should be ready to work harmoniously with other bodies which are concerned directly or indirectly with dramatic work. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that a Drama League County Committee is essentially a Drama League organisation, and that it exists primarily for the benefit of Drama League members. Believing as we do that the development of Drama in this country depends largely on the maintenance of a strong central organisation, it goes without saying that County Committees will first and foremost regard themselves as missionaries of and for the League.

The Council does not wish to lay down any hard and fast rules for the organisation of County work, since conditions are known to vary considerably from place to place. However, the following suggestions have been approved by the Council as indicating the kind of work in which County Committees might well take part.

It is not expected that all the items should be undertaken by any one county. A warning, indeed, might not be misplaced against the attempt to take on more work than can be supported without overstraining either the finance or the personnel of the Committee.

The suggestions which follow are offered for what they are worth. It is hoped shortly to issue a small brochure on County work generally, which may be found of use to those actively engaged in promoting the scheme.

### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES.

1. To draw up a panel of producers, critics, lecturers, and dramatic advisers, all of whom must be approved by Headquarters, who could be recommended to make advisory visits to Societies.
2. To organise Drama Schools, Evening Classes, Lectures and Demonstrations either by the County Committee or in conjunction with the Local Educational Authority, the Rural Community Council or other body to be approved by Headquarters. County Committees are not authorised to organise Schools without consultation with Headquarters.
3. To issue Bulletins at shorter or longer intervals containing a list of production dates—details of Lectures and Schools. Needs and offers of help. List of Actors willing to play special parts, and generally to act as a medium for exchange of ideas, assistance and material in the County. It is suggested that the first issue of this Bulletin every year might be circulated throughout the county for propaganda purposes, but other issues to be confined to members of the League.
4. When possible to afford opportunities for social meetings between members and others interested in Drama.
5. To promote Drama among children and young people in consultation with the Junior Drama Committee at Headquarters.
6. To provide facilities for the mutual exchange of properties, scenery, lighting sets, curtains, etc. (This should also be considered in relation to the bulletin).
7. To stimulate British Drama League Festival entries.
8. To organise First Nighters' or Playgoers' Clubs. Arrangements might also be made for visits to the Theatre by a number of societies together, when special terms are sometimes available.
9. To arrange Exhibitions of Scenic Art. These could some times be organised in connection with other events. The work of local artists should be encouraged.

If even a modicum of the above work be undertaken, it is evident that a greater or less degree of expenditure will be involved. Up to now the general funds of the League,

## THE WORK OF COUNTY COMMITTEES

derived in the main from annual subscriptions of one guinea, have proved only just sufficient to cover the provision of essential services from Headquarters. It must also be remembered that the grants hitherto provided by the Carnegie Trust have recently come to an end. Therefore, no assistance for the financing of specific items of work can be expected from Headquarters. It is believed, however, that properly organised, most if not all of the suggestions above made could be operated in a county on a self-supporting basis. This may require some ingenuity of approach on the part of the Committee, but the Council believes that Committees will realize that projects undertaken primarily for the benefit of an individual county must be supported locally, and cannot be fairly charged to the general funds of the League.

At the same time, the Council recognises a responsibility to ensure that there shall at least be some help offered from Headquarters towards those purely administrative expenses which a County Committee will be put to if it is to be active in carrying out the Council's suggestions. Moreover, in suggesting that County Committees should regard themselves as missionaries of the League, the Council feels that a County Committee should share in whatever benefit comes to the League in respect of new memberships, many of which in each particular county may well result from the activities of the County Committee.

In view of this, the Council has decided to offer to each County an annual advance of £2 on account of a grant of 5s. per unit of such nett increase in membership as may occur during the twelve months following the payment of the advance. It should be noted that this proposal is experimental, and the question of subsequent grants will depend on the financial position of the League at the end of next year.

Any increase in County membership will be calculated as from the membership registered on November 1st, 1936. County Committees, therefore, will have a direct interest in securing new members and affiliated Societies for the League as from that date.

Any County Committee wishing to qualify for this grant must first submit its programme of activities for the ensuing year for the approval of its Area Committee, who will then, if approved, forward the scheme for the approval of the Council.

County Committees are empowered to raise further funds, either from the proceeds of County activities or from special donations from patrons in the County. But such funds, being raised in the name of the Drama League, are to be utilised only for such activities as may be approved from time to time by the Area Committee and the Council. It must be remembered that all County finance forms part of the financial resources of the League, and a duly audited statement of accounts must be submitted to the Council at the end of each financial year.

A recommendation as to the method of accounting will be circulated in due course.

In connection with the above Memorandum, we print herewith the numerical statistics of membership in the various counties where Drama League Committees are active. By the end of next year, is it too much to hope that the membership in each county might be double? The Societies are there. The League is there and anxious to help.

Bedfordshire	..	..	..	19
Berkshire	..	..	..	51
Buckinghamshire	..	..	..	50
Cambridgeshire	..	..	..	48
Cheshire West	..	..	..	} 171
Lancashire West	..	..	..	
Cornwall	..	..	..	23
Cumberland	..	..	..	19
Derbyshire	..	..	..	37
Devonshire	..	..	..	81
Durham	..	..	..	65
Essex	..	..	..	94
Gloucestershire	..	..	..	102
Hampshire	..	..	..	104
Herefordshire	..	..	..	15
Kent	..	..	..	128
Lancashire East	..	..	..	} 190
Cheshire East	..	..	..	
Leicestershire	..	..	..	32
Lincolnshire	..	..	..	56
Norfolk	..	..	..	40
Northamptonshire	..	..	..	38
Northumberland	..	..	..	45
Nottinghamshire	..	..	..	40
Oxfordshire	..	..	..	62
Rutland	..	..	..	7
Shropshire	..	..	..	14
Somerset	..	..	..	47
Staffordshire	..	..	..	54
Suffolk	..	..	..	57
Surrey	..	..	..	190
Sussex	..	..	..	124
Warwickshire	..	..	..	106
Westmorland	..	..	..	18
Wiltshire	..	..	..	39
Worcestershire	..	..	..	42
Yorkshire East Riding	..	..	..	65
Yorkshire West Riding	..	..	..	196
Yorkshire North Riding	..	..	..	40
Middlesex	..	..	..	84



SPANISH EPISODE IN THE SLADE SCHOOL  
CABARET, 18TH DECEMBER, 1936. PRO-  
DUCED BY V. POLUNIN.



SCENE FROM "SHE PASSED THROUGH LORRAINE" AS PRODUCED BY JEAN BELFRAGE FOR THE PILGRIM PLAYERS, EDINBURGH.

# LETTER TO THE EDITOR

SIR.—In the reports and comments concerning the Liverpool Conference which appear in the December issue of your journal, there are several inaccuracies, omissions and exaggerations which do me less than justice.

The Minutes credit me with saying that my firm spend several hundreds of pounds annually for press cuttings on amateur drama. In my speech I casually mentioned that they spend over one hundred pounds. In view of this, your editorial comment that "he made great play with the fabulous expense incurred by his firm on the supply of press cuttings" is unjustified.

The Minutes say that I referred to a deaf adjudicator. I made no such statement. In private conversation with Mr. Whitworth some months ago I mentioned a deaf adjudicator; but, upon finding that I had been misinformed, I carefully omitted the statement from my speech at Liverpool.

The Minutes, in referring to Mr. Whitworth's statement that led up to the "scene," give a different version from that reported in any other place, and put the matter in an entirely different light. The facts are that Mr. Whitworth said, "Mr. Bourne is a magnificent journalist in search of—." He paused, and Mr. Sharman interjected the word "copy." Mr. Whitworth quickly added, "Yes, that's it—copy."

Mr. Bushill Matthews is reported as saying that I have referred to the Central Festival Committee as "Yes Men." I have never made this statement in reference to the Committee; neither has the journal which I edit. The phrase "The Old Gang" has been used in this journal, but not under my name; neither have I given personal expression to it. I take responsibility, as Editor, for its appearance; but it is not a general practice to confuse the personal views of an editor with those expressed in the journal he edits. In this connection I would point out your own statement at the head of your leading article in which you, as Editor of "Drama," separate yourself from opinions expressed by individuals.

In your leading article you state, "During the last few months the journal in question ('The Amateur Theatre') has published a series of editorial comments on the League which have been far from polite." During the twelve months preceding the Conference, there have been twenty-two issues of the magazine in which there have appeared three editorial criticisms only of the League and three only of the Festival Committee. There have also been articles of praise and support for other aspects of the League's work—but these, of course, have been forgotten.

In the summary (which is otherwise fair, if not full) of the meeting of the Central Festival Committee which I attended, there are three omissions which, upon receipt of the draft, I asked should be repaired. One is that I did not imply that adjudicators in preliminary festivals should necessarily be invited to judge the final of that particular festival. The second is that I suggested that, if for financial or other reasons it was felt that an annual festival should be held in London, consideration might be given to a programme representative of a variety of work, and supplied by the four or five highest-marked teams in the festival, irrespective of the areas. The third is that I stated at the meeting (*vide* the verbatim report), "I and the

many who agree with me are not opposed to a British Drama League Festival; our only anxiety is that it should not drift into chaos. If the dissatisfaction can be put right—well and good; but if not, it would be better to abandon the Festival as at present constituted."

My suggestions that the above statements of mine should be included in the report was not granted.

If the foregoing facts are taken into account, it will be seen that my resolution aimed at nothing but the improvement of the Festival. If my "magnificent journalism" has been impolite, it has at least been accurate.

Yours very truly,

JOHN BOURNE.

WE are glad to print the above letter, if only because it supplements the report of the meeting of the Central Festival Committee published in last month's "Drama." This report was printed as forwarded to us by the Central Festival Committee, and we had no authority to alter or add to it.

In regard to Mr. Bourne's observations on our report of the Liverpool Conference, we can only say that the shorthand notes of our Secretary confirm the accuracy (in spite of necessary condensation) of the report as printed.

It is true that Mr. Bushill-Matthews made a slip in saying that "The Amateur Theatre" had referred editorially to the Central Festival Committee as "Yes Men." In fact the phrase was used in reference to the Council of the League—*Vide* "Amateur Theatre" July, 1936.—a distinction surely without much difference. How far an editor is personally involved in his own editorial notes is a nice point in casuistry. In the present case, Mr. Bourne would appear to stress the connection, since his name as Editor appears prominently on the front page of each number of "The Amateur Theatre." If the anonymous editor of "Drama" takes care to dissociate himself from opinions expressed in signed articles, the implication is that he is personally responsible for unsigned editorials.—EDITOR. "Drama."

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EDINBURGH.

"She Passed Through Lorraine" by Lionel Hale was recently presented in St. Columba's Hall, Edinburgh, by a company of players under the direction of Miss Jean Belfrage. The costumes of the period (supplied by the British Drama League Costume Department) set a key which was followed up by the acting, and thus provided what seemed a truthful expression of a farm-house in Lorraine in the years following the death of Joan of Arc. The performance was notable for some individual studies, and in the part of Joan, Miss Cochrane, speaking always with good elocutionary effect, managed to impart some personal impressiveness to her creation. A crowded audience cordially applauded the performance.

# THE TEACHING OF DRAMA

THE Conference on the Teaching of Drama organised last summer by the British Drama League and the Association Tutors in Adult Education, and held by the invitation of University College, Hull, in Thwaite Hall, was significant of the increasing interest of educationalists in art. A short report cannot do justice to the eight speakers who read papers or to the many other interesting contributions, but it may perhaps give a rough outline of the main discussions.

Broadly, the talks tended to reveal the very different problems facing those on the one hand who are attempting to teach acting and production as remedial recreations, particularly in clubs for the unemployed or for young people; and on the other hand those who seek to develop in students a critical faculty and a broader experience of life through an understanding of dramatic texts. Provocative statements such as Miss Mackenzie's "Acting is not an intellectual or academic pursuit, and reading is a useless approach," or Mr. Newton's "The producer is not concerned with the quality of the material but to find the seed of 'theatre' and display that," prompted lively discussion, which would, however, have had greater value if speakers had indicated the type of work they were doing. Both Mr. Newton and Miss Mackenzie put forward many constructive criticisms and suggestions for studying the art of the Producer and Actor, while Mr. Martin Browne's account of his own methods of studying drama through a mixture of rehearsal and discussion was very illuminating.

Professor Searls' talk on "The Tutor's Approach to his Group" had a more specialised appeal for those taking Adult Education classes and described the ideal organisation of the class and division into lecture, discussion and creative work. This aspect of drama was amplified by Mr. G. E. T. Mayfield describing "The Study of the Art of the Dramatist," which was particularly valuable for its hints on the best roads to lead students to an appreciation of the Gods... Chekov, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Aeschylus.

It is tempting to perpetuate much more of the experience and common-sense embodied in these discussions of practical problems, but at least half the conference was taken up with the fundamental and more difficult question of the exact place of drama in education. In introducing the subject in the first talk, "Drama as an Interpretation of Life," Mr. J. A. Hughes made large claims for drama and for the value of education of the emotions as well as to train for careers. Comparing the attitude to art in this country and in the U.S.S.R. Mr. Hughes said he found the Russian theatre the most exciting in the world to-day because it reflects the beliefs of the whole people, and urged that a study of drama by educating emotion could give students in this country some belief (perhaps belief in the life of the imagination) to compensate for our lack of faith in our present civilization. Mr. Mayfield, however, warned the Conference of the dangers of crude emotionalism, such as flourish in Nazi Germany, but he saw the cure in detailed study that strengthens the critical faculty.

The Vice Chancellor of McGill University drew a parallel between the place of drama in this country—the 'naughty sister' among the arts, cold shouldered in education—and its place on the curriculum at McGill

or the warm reception of Professor Baker's work at Harvard and Yale. But he advised the Conference, to recognise the force of the puritan tradition which still bars pleasure from education, and feared that the work was just as likely to suffer from popularity as from repression.

The necessity of maintaining high standards was emphasised by most speakers, and that this is probably one of the greatest difficulties in the teaching of drama at present was indicated when two speakers with the widest knowledge, Miss Mackenzie and Miss Kelly, referred to the low standards prevalent in the amateur movement as a whole. But if her analysis of the present state of drama was depressing, nevertheless Miss Kelly more than any other speaker dug to the roots both of the troubles of the movement to-day and its possibilities for the future. The present triviality of the work of the amateur theatre she traced to the post-war revulsion from emotion and pursuit of a romantic escape, a state of affairs that can only be improved when amateur actors and audiences alike are ready to think on bigger lines. The place for education in drama she suggested, should be to train actors and audience to find more courage, and to enable them to perform and enjoy less trivial plays and encourage dramatists to write them.

There was evidently some confusion throughout the conference as whether in discussing the place of drama in education we meant education *through* drama (i.e. through the practice of acting and production) or education *in* drama (i.e. learning to appreciate the dramatic work of other people); and opinions to the end were still divided on the question of whether encouraging people to act is a moral panacea or a dangerous but useful drug. There was however, unanimity of belief in the importance of a drama that truly reflects the reality and not only the superficiality of life and the necessity of educating standards of taste in actors and audience.

In view of this belief, it was an unflattering comment on the present state of the theatre in England that only one speaker appeared to envisage visits to the theatre as part of a dramatic education.

H.D.B.

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## "SEED OF ADAM"

The Chelmsford Diocesan Religious Drama Guild announces a performance of "Seed of Adam," a new play by Mr. Charles Williams, acted by the Hornchurch members of the Guild. A performance will be given at 3 p.m. at the Town Hall, Brentwood. The Lord Bishop of Chelmsford, Miss Lena Ashwell and Mr. T. S. Eliot will speak. In the morning, at 11 a.m., the Chelmsford 1936 Nativity Play will be given in the same Hall by the children of Great Waltham. Tickets for the morning, 2s 6d. and 1s., and for the afternoon, 5s., 2s 6d. and 1s., can be obtained from Miss P. M. Potter, Great Waltham, Chelmsford.

# NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

## O.U.D.S.

THE Oxford University Dramatic Society offer every year some one-act plays written and produced by members of the Society. This year's performance took place at the beginning of December in the pleasing Little Theatre which forms part of the Club's premises.

The plays were "Wise Men of Gotham" by John Irvine (Christ Church); "Old Suit" by Bruno Brown (Hertford); "No Sharper Spur" by the President of the Club, Peter Watling (Trinity); "Publican and Sinners" by Walter Andrewes (Keble).

"Wise Men of Gotham" was an amusing trifle in the best undergraduate manner. The three other plays, in various styles, all showed serious merit, and evince a real creative ability among members of the Club. They would be worth publishing, and the chance thus given of being seen upon the stage elsewhere.

The last play, "Publican and Sinners," though on a theme familiar enough in religious plays, was freshly observed and was acted in a really moving manner, particularly by Peter Watling and John Featherstone Witty.

## SLADE SCHOOL.

The Stage Design Section under Mr. V. Polunin contributed an admirable cabaret entertainment to the annual Slade School dance which took place on Friday, December 18.

A special stage of the Tuppence Coloured variety had been erected, which though tiny was so well proportioned that the effect was by no means insignificant. All the items were manifestly the work of artists, in that nothing was attempted beyond their powers, and everything showed, in its own way, a real achievement. Dresses, lighting, and scenery produced a delightful harmony of effect, as will be seen by the illustration of a Spanish item which is reproduced in this issue, from a photograph specially taken by Mr. Pollard Crowther. We look forward to seeing the work of many of these promising students on the stage before long.

## CHARD SCHOOL

Chard School's choice for their Annual Shakespearean production was "A Midsummer Night's Dream" which was produced in the Corn Exchange.

Such limited scene-changing as was required was done in full view of the audience by means of curtain boys, and this device did away with any waits between scenes or long pauses between acts. The scenery itself was simple but attractive and the setting of the stage for the wood near Athens was particularly beautiful.

As in former years the speaking was clear and audible, whilst the majority of actors caught not only the technical metre of the verse but the underlying poetry also. In addition to the major characters special praise must be meted out to the fairies and elves, whose gambols were exactly suited to the spirit of the play, and whose singing added enjoyment to the evening in no little measure. Mendelssohn's music was used throughout, played by a talented orchestra under the direction of Mr. H. H. Fowler.

The Play was produced by the Headmaster and, with only one interval, it ran smoothly from start to finish and gave evident pleasure to a large audience.

## RUISLIP MANOR SENIOR SCHOOL.

Those who despair at the devastating advance of mechanical entertainment should have seen the production of "The Ghost Train" by the pupils of the Ruislip Manor Senior School on November 26th and 27th. Living in the midst of one of those new mushroom-like growths which are cluttering up the countryside, where social and cultural influences are as yet unknown, these children have never seen a proper theatre or real live actors. Their conception of 'drama' has been of the "gripping" and "stupendous" kind, which is blared forth regularly from the concrete depths of the latest super-cinema. Yet they displayed a vigour and skill which was as remarkable as it was gratifying. And this is no specially endowed or favoured school. It is one of those thousands of public elementary schools where the children leave at the age of fourteen to fill our factories and flood our offices. If their enthusiasm now is such that they can sacrifice three evenings a week for three months at rehearsals, then I feel certain that the fate of the theatre is quite reassured.

Their production of "The Ghost Train" was excellent. All the actors with few exceptions had never performed before, and it was therefore all the more interesting to find no trace of self-consciousness. The freshness and spontaneity of these children whose average age was twelve would have put many adult societies to shame. The timing and pace was good and the suspense was well maintained. Movements were natural and the grouping effective—and there was evidence of much patient drilling by Mr. J. Watt, the producer. But greater attention should have been paid to the dramatic pauses, and the elocution though good suffered at times by an inclination to drop the head. Every member of the cast played well particularly Peter Petterson as Teddy Deakin and Ella Beaton as Julia Price. The audience which was large and enthusiastic was inclined to be amused rather than terrified—but that is often the case when there is a passionate interest in the cast.

As a reward for their labours, the actors are to have their energies replenished with a tea and visit to a London theatre, at the headmaster's expense. He is doubly wise.

PHILIP L. LORRAINE.

## WATFORD REPERTORY COMPANY

Gertrude Jennings stumbled on a psychological secret when she wrote "Family Affairs," for most of the humour of the piece relies upon the fact that other people's families are very like one's own. The domestic mirror is well and truly held up to the audience, and the Watford Repertory Company, who staged the play at the St. John's Hall recently, succeeded in conveying the points of the play.

From an actor's standpoint the piece bristles with difficulties, for though it is called a comedy, the play, as a matter of fact, is a well-shaken mixture of all the histrionic "grades." The many variations and tempo would tax even the most seasoned of actors.

The play was produced by Rose Lloyd-King, who very wisely avoided treating it as a London success.

From the moment the curtain went up it was certain there would be an interesting evening.

## NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

### NEW ZEALAND BRANCH OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE.

We have to report an active year and several forward steps. Forty-two meetings of the National Executive have been held during the year.

The one small room at 172, Featherstone Street has already been found inadequate and the Executive has been fortunate in getting a second slightly larger room opening out of the original office, where the Library is now housed and committees held.

Miss Elizabeth Loe arrived in New Zealand on March 30th, and at once began her work; naturally her first year is an arduous one, with the incessant moving from place to place and learning to know a constant stream of new people quite apart from her actual work.

The National Final Festival was held at Hastings on Thursday, October 3rd. The judges were Miss Blake, Mr. Arnold Goodwin, of Auckland, and Mr. P. Latham, of Wanganui.

The number of groups affiliated through the areas are 266 and about 230 individual members.

Three new Areas have been added to the League as a result of a tour by Miss Blake in February last; these Areas are Gisborne and Poverty Bay, Rotorua, and Waikato. A good deal of enthusiasm was found by Miss Blake. Area Festivals are being held in the new areas and Waikato in particular has made a vigorous start.

Three Drama Schools organised by the Central Office in collaboration with the Area Committees of the locality have been held this year, at Dunedin, Havelock North and Wanganui; all very successful from the point of view of work done, though in the two latter cases the local support was disappointing.

Miss Blake heard from the Secretary of the Carnegie Corporation of New York that a grant of one thousand two hundred and fifty dollars (£250) had been made to the Central Library of the League. This has now been received. While in England Miss Blake consulted the Head Librarian of the B.D.L. Library in London and got from her a list of books. This was sent to New York at Dr. Keppel's request and the additions to the Library will be chosen from that list. The work of running the Library will increase considerably and extra salary will have to follow in due course. The application for a grant for general purposes was declined.

The Library now consists of 185 sets of plays (38 three-act and 147 one-act)—30 of which are new this year. There are 15 one-act plays among the new ones. The receipts show a substantial increase on those for the same period in 1935. During the year 4,728 plays have been sent out.

**IN CONCLUSION.** As we look back we see some real progress, three new areas, the arrival of Miss Loe, the news of the Carnegie Grant to the Library, all good and encouraging signs; perhaps also some breaking down of the old parochial attitude which without any knowledge of work in other centres reiterated its belief in its own local supremacy: that form of blindness is still with us, but we are increasingly conscious of it and already it begins to be less common. In the same way competition, if it is carried out in a discerning and sportsmanlike way, is healthy and stimulating, but the will to win for winning's sake only is wrong, and that the League in all its areas is out to stop. This movement owes its vitality to love of beauty to a desire to understand life more widely than any individual experience can achieve. Its aim is human happiness, its motive power, mutual toleration and love.

### LIVERPOOL AUTHOR'S NEW PLAY.

The Unity Players of Liverpool, one of Merseyside's most enterprising amateur societies, supplemented their distinguished record when, on November 26, 27 and 28, they presented for the first time on any stage a new play, "Come Destiny," written by Mrs. Helen Miller, one of the foundation-members of the society and an amateur actress who is held in high esteem in local circles. Mrs. Miller had previously written only one play, a one-act entitled "Beauty Into Beast" which the same society performed in last season's British Drama League Festival, and which was adjudged the second-best new play given in the festival throughout the country.

"Come Destiny," which is in a prologue and three acts, is set in 15th century Italy, and tells the story of a young Florentine sculptor who falls into the power of Filippo Borgia—an imaginary, not an historical, character—who uses him as a "ghost" to create sculptures which Filippo, having pretensions as an artist as well as a politician, passes off as his own.

The play suffers from a thin plot, a technique that, while generally satisfactory, is sometimes a little obvious, and a lack of sufficient dramatic conflict to fill three full acts. On the credit side, it has many moments of excellent drama, some shrewd and well-observed character-drawing, and dialogue which, while sometimes ornate and unconvincing, is on the whole, marked by theatrical intelligence.

The production, by Eustace Chelioti, was well-designed, and ran very smoothly, if a little slowly, while the acting, although hardly vigorous or expert enough to gloss over the play's defects, was at all points eminently sincere, and, in one or two individual cases, outstandingly effective—Marie-Louise Chelioti's Beatrice and Marjorie Dixon's Battista both being performances of considerable merit. The production gained by good costuming which the one curtain-setting of the three acts showed up to excellent advantage.

OSCAR L. TURNER.

### GLOUCESTER GIRL'S HIGH SCHOOL.

The value of choosing Shakespeare for school productions is that the lines so constantly repeated by the actors during rehearsals are among the most beautiful in the language. This point had evidently been appreciated by the Dramatic Society of this school when it presented "The Merchant of Venice," for in the majority of cases enunciation was good and the acting evidenced a real understanding of the parts played.

The chief protagonists in the racial clash, which incidentally finds its counterpart to-day, gave well-conceived performances; a melancholy Antonio was aided by a particularly virile Bassanio; Shylock, played with skill, succeeded in arousing the audience's sympathy, though his final discomfiture should have been more moving; Portia gave the impression of a great lady and during the Court proceedings created with dignified efficiency an atmosphere of reality which this scene often lacks.

The play, acted on a stage designed for the school by Mr. Angus Wilson, was ably produced by Miss Neve and all the scenery and costumes were made in the school.

M.S.T.

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